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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to identify training activities that are helpful in preparing secondary school students to become effective workers. First, 12 activities designed to prepare secondary school leavers for clerical/administrative jobs were identified through a literature review and a pilot study of 468 final-year secondary school students in Queensland, Australia. The relative effectiveness of those activities was examined through interviews of 4 groups of individuals: 21 grade 12 school leavers; 12 new recruits in clerical positions who had just completed grade 12; 14 individuals who had been in the clerical work force for 12 months; and 11 supervisors. The interviewees were asked to rate the activities in terms of helpfulness in preparing school leavers to perform clerical jobs. Follow-up clarification interviews and case studies of eight selected members of the four groups were also conducted. It was concluded that, although the education system must introduce specific work preparation activities, much of school leavers' success in the work force depends on their own basic skills, such as self-initiative and self-discipline. A combination of basic skills preparation before work force entry and on-the-job training was determined to be the critical factor in making a successful transition from school leaver to effective worker. (Contains 74 references.) (MN)

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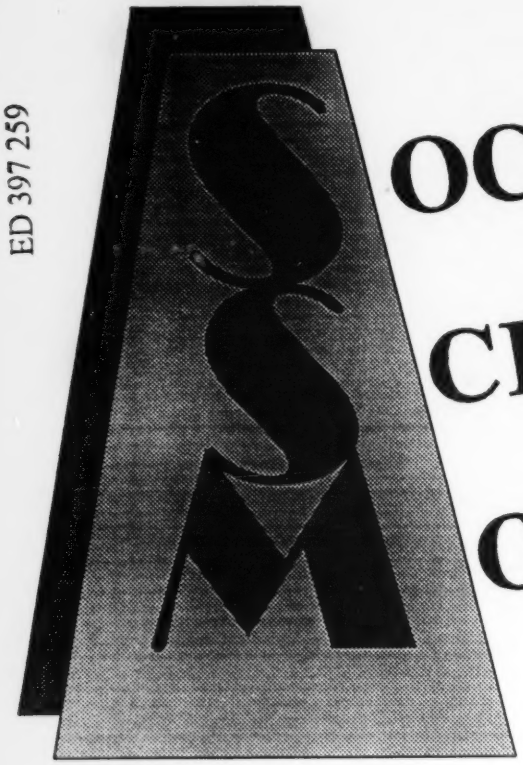

SOCIAL SCIENCE MONOGRAPHS

1995/No. 2

Dr Kathryn Gow

The Transition From School Leaver to Effective Worker

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SOCIAL SCIENCE MONOGRAPHS

1995/No. 2

Dr Kathryn Gow

The Transition From School Leaver to Effective Worker

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> Williams and Best (1982) in their study.....
>
> ..... attitudes to minorities (Beswick & Hills, 1972; Callan, 1986; McAlister & Moore, 1991; Walker, 1994) .....

Reference List (to be given at the end of the text)

> Beswick, D. G., & Hills, M. D. (1972). A survey of ethnocentrism in Australia. *Australian Journal of Psychology, 24*, 153-163.
>
> Callan, V. J. (1986). *Australian minority groups*. Sydney: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich.

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The Social Science Monographs has commenced publication with its first issues in 1995 after a gestation period of some two years. There was a need for a refereed series of monographs or articles which could report research and practical work in progress, discuss conceptualisations of responses to issues whether theory or practice based, provide opportunity for commentary on professional areas generally in the social sciences and provide an outlet for staff members wanting to publish work they might think was not yet "completed" or ready for submission to the international journal scene. Thus the Social Science Monographs (or Monograph Series) grew out of the need essentially, for a "refereed working paper series" in the School of Social Science, Queensland University of Technology. The original policy formulation for the Social Science Monographs allows similar papers to be published in due course in more prestigous or established national and international journals, provided the publication in the Social Science Monographs is cited. Already the Social Science Monographs has gone beyond the initial formulations and has attracted submissions from beyond the School. Six Monographs have been accepted for published in 1995 and a further seven submissions are currently being reviewed for publication in 1996.

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The papers which have been accepted after review, for publication in 1995, are the following:

Hicks, R. E. & Leicester, J. A. (1995). Developing teamwork skills inside and outside the classroom. *Social Science Monographs 1995/No 1.*

Gow, K. A. (1995). How adequately are school leavers educated for the world of work? *Social Science Monographs 1995/No 2.*

Venardos, C. P. (1995). Work commitment and parental roles. *Social Science Monographs 1995/No 3.*

Harrison, P. (1995). The return of the 'native': Modernity, difference and postcolonialism. *Social Science Monographs 1995/No 4.*

Adkins, B. (1995). What is Aesthetic Legitimacy?: From Bourdieu's Model to Settings of Aesthetic Practice. *Social Science Monographs 1995/No 5.*

Webb, E., Lennings, C., Denton, M. & Harris, J. (1995). Dual Diagnosis: A Review of the Field. *Social Science Monographs 1995/No 6.*

As initial Editor of the Social Science Monographs (1994-5) I am pleased to see its birth and development and believe the Monograph Series is helping meet the needs that led to its introduction. I believe a continuing demand exists for a Series such as the Social Science Monographs and I encourage interested authors to make contact initially with the Publication Editors, Donna Keogh and Zlatko Skrbis. They and the full editorial board, along with the anonymous reviewers and the administrative and secretarial staff, are all thanked for their contributions to the successful inauguration of the Social Science Monographs.

Richard E. Hicks
Head, School of Social Science.

The Transition From School Leaver to Effective Worker

Kathryn M. Gow
School of Social Science
Queensland University of Technology

ABSTRACT

The study sought to ascertain which training activities were considered helpful in preparing school leavers to become effective workers. Final year secondary school students were surveyed initially to explore their knowledge and expectations about work. Repertory Grid technology was utilized in further interviews with school leavers, new recruits, experienced recruits and supervisors. Case studies were developed, to determine which training activities were considered helpful in preparing school leavers for work. The results indicated that whereas the fundamental prerequisite for success in the workforce was the acquisition of certain basic skills and abilities prior to occupational entry, the critical factor in becoming a "high flier" and better than the "just average", "run-of-the-mill" worker, was a combination of basic preparation before workforce entry and on-the-job training.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

To (H) who taught me about the need for effective coaching.

INTRODUCTION

It has been commonly assumed that the Australian education system does not train secondary school students adequately to cope with the work environment (Wilson, 1979). However with the passage from school to work no longer guaranteed (Eccleston, 1995; Fraser & Kennedy, 1990; QUT, 1995), the Australian Government has enacted policy initiatives to assist in the transition for young people (ANTA, 1994, 1995; Finn 1991; Mayer, 1992). Some of the initiatives have been seen to have had positive outcomes for students, parents, teachers and the community (Fraser & Kennedy, 1990; NSW BVET, 1994a, 1994b), but few studies have concentrated on the impact of these initiatives in the real world context in which education and training are intended to prepare school leavers for the work force and the international workplace (Gow 1995a; Lepani, 1995; Raizen, 1989).

Whether or not it is the employers' prerogative to provide a gradual transition and supportive environment for the development of competencies in entry level workers is currently being debated at the international level in the media and political, professional, and educational circles (Australian Student traineeship Foundation, 1995; Gow, 1995b, 1995c; Oxenham, 1988; Ropp, 1989; Sweet, 1995; Vaughan, 1989).

With increasing government pressure on organisations to employ unqualified young people, the employers could be defending their position by rationalising that it is the educational system which is failing. There has been a long standing attitude among employers that, if the school leaver comes to work without the basic skills, that is the problem of the individual and not of the employer. Thus it could be that Australian employers tolerate, rather than appreciate the experiences and "meaning systems" of new recruits who come to them directly from school, because they perceive them to be "not up to scratch" in terms of preparedness (Clark, 1986; Dawson, 1986; "Senior Educator", 1985; "The Courier Mail", 1995).

The school leaver's readiness to engage in workforce activities is considered doubtful because of a perceived lack of skills. In the western world, a number of studies have focused on identifying basic skills and competencies required of school leavers by employers (Cumming, 1988; Departments of Commerce, Education & Labour, 1988; Forbes & Miller, 1988; Gow, 1995d; Natriello, 1989; Sredl & Rothwell, 1987). An increasing number of writers are debating the more precise components of what the actual dimensions of those skills and competencies are (ASTEC, 1987; Buswell, 1986; Gore & Murray, 1991; Oliveira, 1995; Raisen, 1989) and trying to detail exactly which types of learning at school can engender those skills best (Docking, 1995; Oxenham, 1988) to be utilized within a specific context (Barrow, 1991; Gow & Chant, 1995; Vernados, 1995).

The purpose of this paper is to investigate how school leavers, new recruits, experienced recruits and supervisors construed specific training activities that could be considered helpful in the socialisation process of preparing school leavers to become effective clerical workers. The consequences of their not receiving that training at the critical points in the transition process are explored.

The Helpful Activities

The term activities as used in the framework of this study refers to those "areas of knowledge, ability and skill that increase an individual's effectiveness in dealing with the world" (Cohen, Fink, Gadon & Willits, 1980, p. 173), in this case the world of work.

Through the results obtained from the pilot study, involving 468 final year secondary school students, and a review of the research literature on both the transition from school to work and preparation for work, 12 activities were selected as elements to elicit the participants' understandings of the work role mechanisms. The context in which those training activities are examined is the clerical work

environment. The 12 activities are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: The 12 Elements - Activities that Help Prepare Young People to Handle Clerical/Administrative Jobs More Effectively

ELEMENTS
1. Participating in Work Experience Programmes at School.
2. Accepting and taking on responsibility.
3. Developing a respectful attitude to authority.
4. Talking through (discussing) expectations about what happens at work.
5. Training in self discipline.
6. Developing self initiative.
7. Getting used to (experiencing) positive and negative feedback from someone in authority.
8. Clarifying beliefs about the meaningfulness and purpose of work.
9. Developing skills in handling conflict.
10. Developing listening skills.
11. Developing problem solving-conceptual skills.
12. Developing problem solving-interpersonal skills.

The first six elements (1-6) represent activities which have been repeatedly studied by other researchers prior to the commencement of this project. The other six elements (7-12) represent activities which have not been explored at any great depth in the literature on the transition from school to work.

The main assumption underlying the author's research model which tracks the central process involved in the transition from school to work is that without exposure to such activities at certain critical points, recruits may fail to become effective clerical workers.

These critical points are: (a) prior exposure to training for work at school leaving age; (b) induction and immediate on-the-job training at point of entry for the new recruit; (c) performance feedback and training as the recruit becomes more

experienced; and (d) continued training to take the experienced recruit to the effective worker stage.

In order for school leavers to become effective workers, they must firstly be exposed to pre-work socialization and then carefully orientated to the workplace and given on-the-job training in the form of specific skill acquisition. The supervisors must then continue to provide performance feedback and further training to the new recruits before they can be accepted as socialized. Thus feedback and training needs to be continued for as long as necessary to "train up" the experienced recruit to the level of an effective worker. Without this training, they may become disillusioned and apathetic workers.

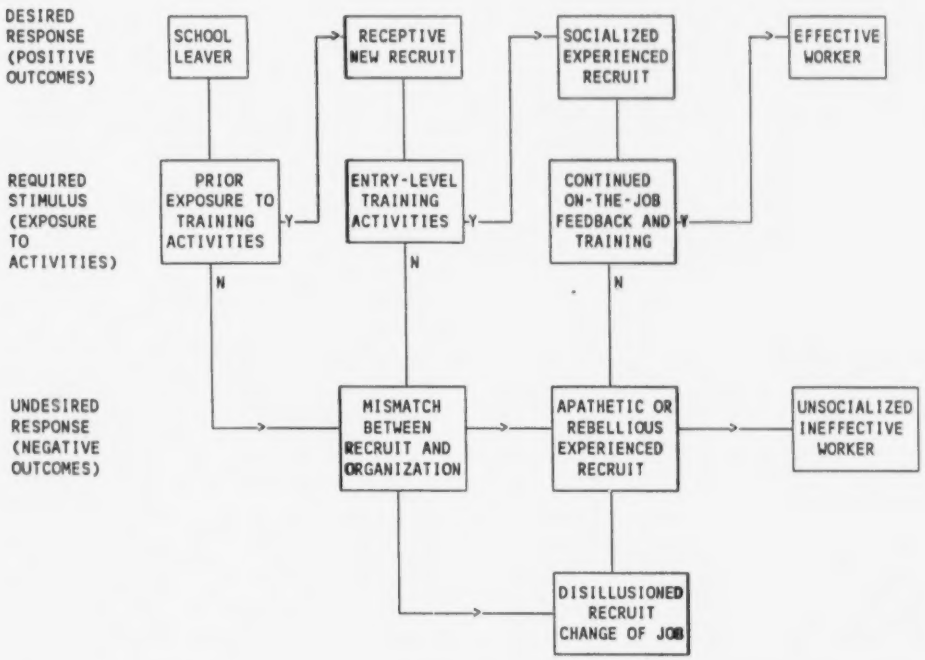

Figure 1: The Conceptual Model: Positive and Negative Outcomes in the Mesosystem during the Transition from School to Work

Transition From School To Work Considered In Personal Construct Terms

Personal Construct Theory (Kelly, 1955) permits a concentration on the changes taking place within adolescents as they proceed through the change cycle from being school students to workers. Such changes can provide valuable insights into the self as the individual moves through the mesosystem (Young, 1983) from school leaver to new recruit, to experienced recruit and then finally to effective worker. For the new construct system to evolve, the individuals need to revise their hypotheses about the world of work through experience (Kelly, 1955). This leads to resocialization as long as the individual has been exposed early in life to such "anticipatory socialization" (Brim, 1966; Feldman, 1981; Vernados, 1995), which is all the learning that occurs before the new recruit joins the organisation.

Kelly's personal construct theory and Repertory grid techniques provided a theoretical and methodological basis for the behaviours, feelings and opinions that were identified by the participants. The case studies gave support to the research model in that they verified the need for training activities for the new recruit at each of the critical points of the transition from school leaver to effective worker.

METHOD

Participants

In this study, there were 4 groups of participants: (a) 21 grade 12 school leavers, aged 16-18 (6 males and 15 females); (b) new recruits in clerical positions at work who had just completed grade 12, aged 17-19 (8 females and 4 males); (c) experienced recruits (4 males and 10 females) under 21 years of age who had been in the clerical workforce for 12 months; and (d) 7 female and 4 male supervisors.

The Repertory Grid Instrument

Bannister and Mair (1968) define a Repertory grid as "any form of sorting task which allows for the assessment of relationships between constructs and which yields these primary data in matrix form" (p. 136). This repertory grid instrument was designed to explore the commonality of thinking in relation to activities considered helpful in preparing the school leaver for the world of work.

Shaw's (1978) multivariate computer program FOCUS was used to analyse the individual grids within each of the four groups. Next, the SOCIOGRIDS program was used to explore the similarities and differences in construings between participants in each group (Pope & Shaw, 1981).

Nine bipolar constructs were elicited from the new recruits by a method of triadic elicitation, and varied for each participant. The grid form provided space for 9 elicited bipolar constructs and 12 columns for ratings of elements. Construct 10 "most helpful - least helpful" was provided as a measure of helpfulness of the elements.

Presentation of the Grid

The participants completed the Repertory grid task which consisted of eliciting constructs about the 12 activities, and then rating them in terms of their helpfulness in preparing a school leaver to perform a clerical job more effectively.

Follow up clarification interviews were conducted with eight selected members (stars and isolates) of the four groups. They explained why they thought they had clustered the elements and constructs with the supplied construct "most helpful" as they did. Each of the individuals labelled the clusters of elements and constructs

and elaborated how these constructs were seen as helping school leavers prepare for work more effectively.

Case studies were then prepared for each of the eight demonstrably salient participants. Telephone interviews were conducted two and a half years later with all the case study participants and the supervisors of the recruits.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The shared construings of the activities for each group of school leavers, new recruits, experienced recruits and supervisors are discussed. The numbers in brackets refer to the activities in Table 1. These activities are known as elements in personal construct terminology (Kelly, 1955). Table 2 lists the case studies' participants ratings of helpful activities.

Table 2: Case Studies - Participants' Ratings of Helpful Activities

	Activities											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Participant												
SL*	4	3	2	3	1	2	1	2	2	3	2	2
SLO.	2	2	1	3	2	1	3	3	2	1	1	1
NR*	1	3	1	5	2	2	1	4	1	1	2	1
NRO.	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	2	1	1
ER*	3	2	2	3	1	1	2	3	3	2	1	2
ERO.	1	3	2	1	3	2	1	1	2	2	1	1
SUP*	1	3	2	1	3	3	1	3	2	2	4	3
SUPO.	1	2	3	2	1	2	2	3	4	5	5	4

Note: Where 1, 2 = Most Helpful; 4, 5 = Least Helpful; and * = star and O. = isolate.

FOUR GROUPS' VIEWS ON HELPFULNESS OF ACTIVITIES

School Leavers

In determining which activities school leavers (refer Figure 2) considered to be most helpful in preparing them to become effective workers, they rated work experience (1) as most helpful, whereas discussing expectations (4) and clarifying beliefs about work (8) were rated least helpful. The school leavers were unsure about the value of accepting responsibility (2), skills in handling conflict (9) and listening skills (10). All other activities were considered mostly helpful.

It was apparent that these school leavers thought that self initiative (6) and self discipline (5) were the most important activities that they would need to become effective workers, as they believed these activities would help them deal with authority and prepare them to receive feedback from others.

New Recruits

The new recruits (see Figure 3) considered listening skills (10) to be the most helpful activity with skills in handling conflict (9), problem solving interpersonal skills (12) and self discipline (5) being the next most helpful. The new recruits linked these skills with feedback and respect for authority, obviously hinting at the difficulty that new recruits had in adjusting to being told what to do and whether they were doing the task the right or wrong way. Paramount in their experience was the need to have the skills to deal with authority and to receive feedback on their performance.

They interpreted the subset of activities (4, 2 and 1) as preparation beforehand through work experience programs, club responsibilities and discussing expectations about work.

Figure 2: School Leavers' Mode Grid

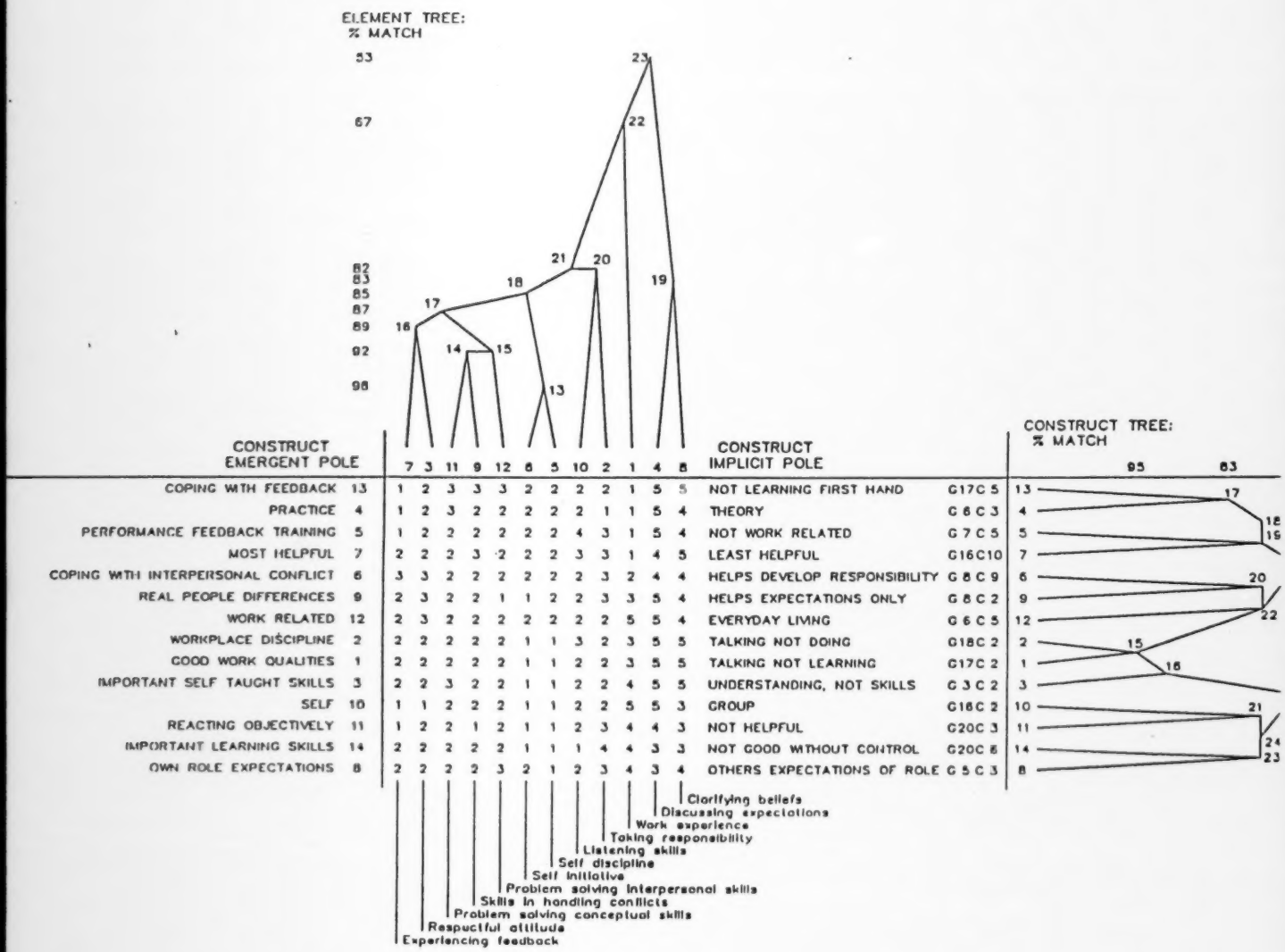
ELEMENT TREE:
% MATCH
53
67
82
83
85
87
89
92
98
23
22
21
20
19
18
17
16
15
14
13
CONSTRUCT TREE:
% MATCH
95
83
7 3 11 9 12 6 5 10 2 1 4 8
CONSTRUCT EMERGENT POLE
CONSTRUCT IMPLICIT POLE
COPING WITH FEEDBACK 13 1 2 3 3 3 2 2 2 2 1 5 5 NOT LEARNING FIRST HAND G17C 5 13
PRACTICE 4 1 2 3 2 2 2 2 2 1 1 5 4 THEORY G 6 C 3 4
PERFORMANCE FEEDBACK TRAINING 5 1 2 2 2 2 2 2 4 3 1 5 4 NOT WORK RELATED G 7 C 5 5
MOST HELPFUL 7 2 2 2 3 2 2 2 3 3 1 4 5 LEAST HELPFUL G16C10 7
COPING WITH INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT 6 3 3 2 2 2 2 2 2 3 2 4 4 HELPS DEVELOP RESPONSIBILITY G 8 C 9 6
REAL PEOPLE DIFFERENCES 9 2 3 2 2 1 1 2 2 3 3 5 4 HELPS EXPECTATIONS ONLY G 8 C 2 9
WORK RELATED 12 2 3 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 5 5 4 EVERYDAY LIVING G 6 C 5 12
WORKPLACE DISCIPLINE 2 2 2 2 2 2 1 1 3 2 3 5 5 TALKING NOT DOING G18C 2 2
GOOD WORK QUALITIES 1 2 2 2 2 2 1 1 2 2 3 5 5 TALKING NOT LEARNING G17C 2 1
IMPORTANT SELF TAUGHT SKILLS 3 2 2 3 2 2 1 1 2 2 4 5 5 UNDERSTANDING, NOT SKILLS G 3 C 2 3
SELF 10 1 1 2 2 2 1 1 2 2 5 5 3 GROUP G18C 2 10
REACTING OBJECTIVELY 11 1 2 2 1 2 1 1 2 3 4 4 3 NOT HELPFUL G20C 3 11
IMPORTANT LEARNING SKILLS 14 2 2 2 2 2 1 1 1 4 4 3 3 NOT GOOD WITHOUT CONTROL G20C 8 14
OWN ROLE EXPECTATIONS 8 2 2 2 2 3 2 1 2 3 4 3 4 OTHERS EXPECTATIONS OF ROLE G 5 C 3 8
Clarifying beliefs
Discussing expectations
Work experience
Taking responsibility
Listening skills
Self discipline
Self initiative
Problem solving interpersonal skills
Skills in handling conflicts
Problem solving conceptual skills
Respectful attitude
Experiencing feedback

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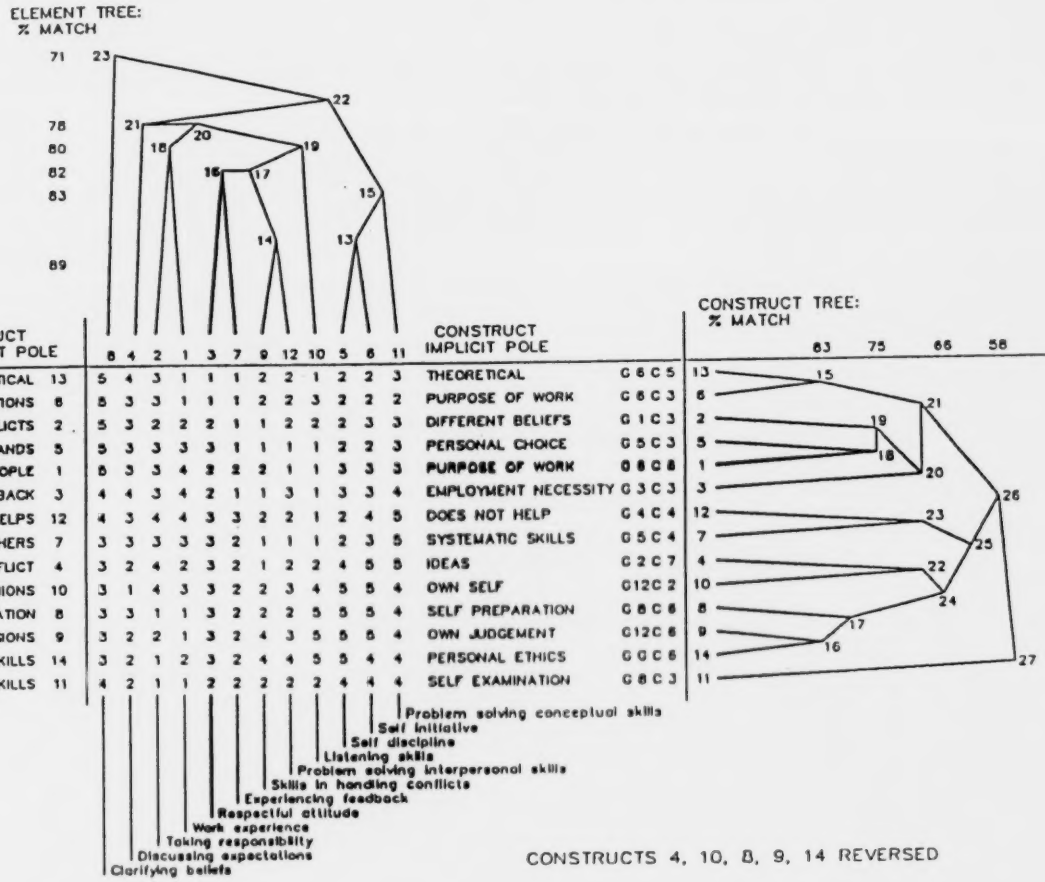
Figure 3: New Recruits' Mode Grid


ELEMENT TREE:
% MATCH
71
78
80
82
83
89
CONSTRUCT TREE:
% MATCH
83
75
66
58
CONSTRUCT EMERGENT POLE
CONSTRUCT IMPLICIT POLE
8 4 2 1 3 7 9 12 10 5 6 11
PRACTICAL 13 5 4 3 1 1 1 2 2 1 2 2 3 THEORETICAL G 6 C 5
WORK SITUATIONS 6 5 3 3 1 1 1 2 2 3 2 2 2 PURPOSE OF WORK G 6 C 3
HANDLING CONFLICTS 2 5 3 2 2 2 1 1 2 2 2 3 3 DIFFERENT BELIEFS G 1 C 3
HANDLING REPRIMANDS 5 5 3 3 3 3 3 1 1 1 1 2 2 3 PERSONAL CHOICE G 5 C 3
HANDLING PEOPLE 1 5 3 3 4 3 2 2 1 1 3 3 3 PURPOSE OF WORK G 6 C 6
HANDLING FEEDBACK 3 4 4 3 4 2 1 1 3 1 3 3 4 EMPLOYMENT NECESSITY G 3 C 3
HELPS 12 4 3 4 4 3 3 2 2 1 2 4 5 DOES NOT HELP G 4 C 4
COPING WITH OTHERS 7 3 3 3 3 3 2 1 1 1 2 3 5 SYSTEMATIC SKILLS G 5 C 4
GROUP CONFLICT 4 3 2 4 2 3 2 1 2 2 4 5 5 IDEAS G 2 C 7
DIFFERENT OPINIONS 10 3 1 4 3 3 2 2 3 4 5 5 4 OWN SELF G12C 2
TEAM CO-OPERATION 8 3 3 1 1 3 2 2 2 5 5 5 4 SELF PREPARATION G 8 C 8
GROUP DECISIONS 9 3 2 2 1 3 2 4 3 5 5 5 4 OWN JUDGEMENT G12C 6
LEADERSHIP SKILLS 14 3 2 1 2 3 2 4 4 5 5 4 4 PERSONAL ETHICS G G C 6
INTERPERSONAL SKILLS 11 4 2 1 1 2 2 2 2 2 4 4 4 SELF EXAMINATION G 8 C 3
Problem solving conceptual skills
Self initiative
Self discipline
Listening skills
Problem solving interpersonal skills
Skills in handling conflicts
Experiencing feedback
Respectful attitude
Work experience
Taking responsibility
Discussing expectations
Clarifying beliefs
CONSTRUCTS 4, 10, 8, 9, 14 REVERSED

Experienced Recruits

Like the employers, the experienced recruits (refer Figure 4) had perceived the roles of these activities in the transition from school leaver to effective worker from almost the same perspective, that is, the new recruits considered that in order to become effective workers, school leavers needed to have problem solving conceptual skills, self discipline and self initiative as almost innate abilities. Activities 4, 1 and 8 (discussing expectations, work experience and clarifying beliefs) were not perceived to be particularly helpful in preparing the school leaver to carry out the other activities (2, 3, 7, 10, 9 and 12).

The experienced recruits rated self discipline (5), self initiative (6) and problem solving conceptual skills (11) as most helpful, construing the successful transition from school to work as being primarily due to the school leavers's abilities before organizational entry. Accepting responsibility, developing a respectful attitude to authority and experiencing positive and negative feedback, as well as listening skills and problem solving interpersonal skills were considered next most helpful in preparing a school leaver to become an effective worker. Work experience (1), discussing expectations (4), clarifying beliefs (8) and handling conflict skills (9) were not considered as helpful as the other activities.

Supervisors

The supervisors perceived all the activities (see Figure 5) to be helpful and as such, there was no identifying positive and negative poles in terms of least helpful/most helpful, whereas with the school leavers and new recruits it was possible to do so.

Supervisors appeared to see the activities as three aspects of the socialisation process.

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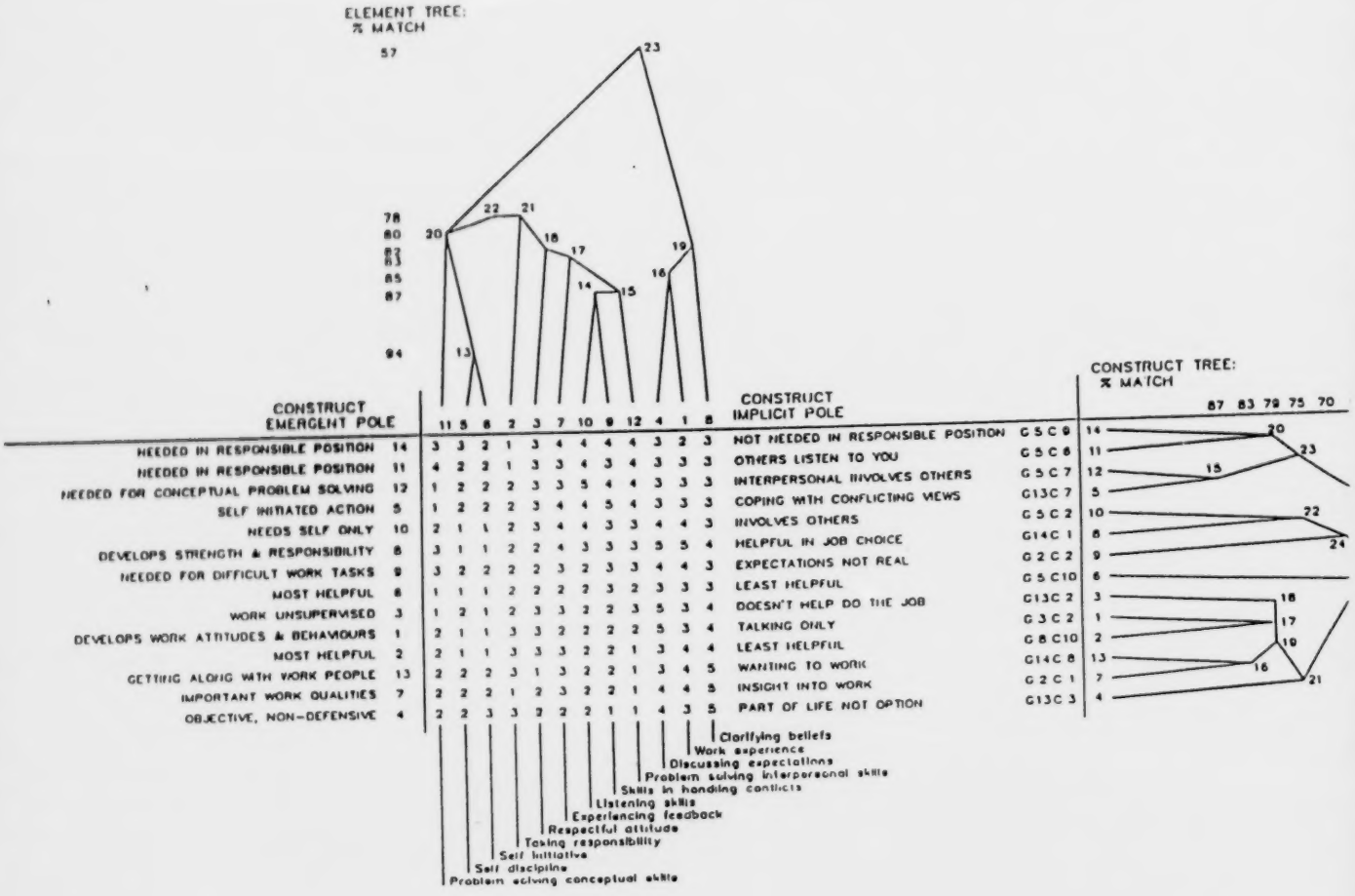
Figure 4: Experienced Recruits' Mode Grid


ELEMENT TREE:
% MATCH
57
78
80
83
85
87
94
CONSTRUCT TREE:
% MATCH
87 83 79 75 70
CONSTRUCT EMERGENT POLE
CONSTRUCT IMPLICIT POLE
11 5 6 2 3 7 10 9 12 4 1 8
NEEDED IN RESPONSIBLE POSITION 14 3 3 2 1 3 4 4 4 4 3 2 3 NOT NEEDED IN RESPONSIBLE POSITION G 5 C 9
NEEDED IN RESPONSIBLE POSITION 11 4 2 2 1 3 3 4 3 4 3 3 3 OTHERS LISTEN TO YOU G 5 C 8
NEEDED FOR CONCEPTUAL PROBLEM SOLVING 12 1 2 2 2 3 3 5 4 4 3 3 3 INTERPERSONAL INVOLVES OTHERS G 5 C 7
SELF INITIATED ACTION 5 1 2 2 2 3 4 4 5 4 3 3 3 COPING WITH CONFLICTING VIEWS G13C 7
NEEDS SELF ONLY 10 2 1 1 2 3 4 4 3 3 4 4 3 INVOLVES OTHERS G 5 C 2
DEVELOPS STRENGTH & RESPONSIBILITY 8 3 1 1 2 2 4 3 3 3 3 5 5 4 HELPFUL IN JOB CHOICE G14C 1
NEEDED FOR DIFFICULT WORK TASKS 9 3 2 2 2 2 3 2 3 3 4 4 3 EXPECTATIONS NOT REAL G 2 C 2
MOST HELPFUL 6 1 1 1 2 2 2 2 3 2 3 3 3 LEAST HELPFUL G 5 C10
WORK UNSUPERVISED 3 1 2 1 2 3 3 2 2 3 5 3 4 DOESN'T HELP DO THE JOB G13C 2
DEVELOPS WORK ATTITUDES & BEHAVIOURS 1 2 1 1 3 3 2 2 2 2 5 3 4 TALKING ONLY G 3 C 2
MOST HELPFUL 2 2 1 1 3 3 3 2 2 1 3 4 4 LEAST HELPFUL G 8 C10
GETTING ALONG WITH WORK PEOPLE 13 2 2 2 3 1 3 2 2 1 3 4 5 WANTING TO WORK G14C 8
IMPORTANT WORK QUALITIES 7 2 2 2 1 2 3 2 2 1 4 4 5 INSIGHT INTO WORK G 2 C 1
OBJECTIVE, NON-DEFENSIVE 4 2 2 3 3 2 2 2 1 1 4 3 5 PART OF LIFE NOT OPTION G13C 3
Clarifying beliefs
Work experience
Discussing expectations
Problem solving interpersonal skills
Skills in handling conflicts
Listening skills
Experiencing feedback
Respectful attitude
Taking responsibility
Self initiative
Self discipline
Problem solving conceptual skills

Their views were that the school leavers needed to be able to learn and perform on the job (through the central activities of 10, 12, 9, 7 and 2), they needed to have the appropriate attributes and skills (5, 6, 11 and 3) and to have been exposed to beforehand certain training preparations through discussion and experience (4, 8 and 1).

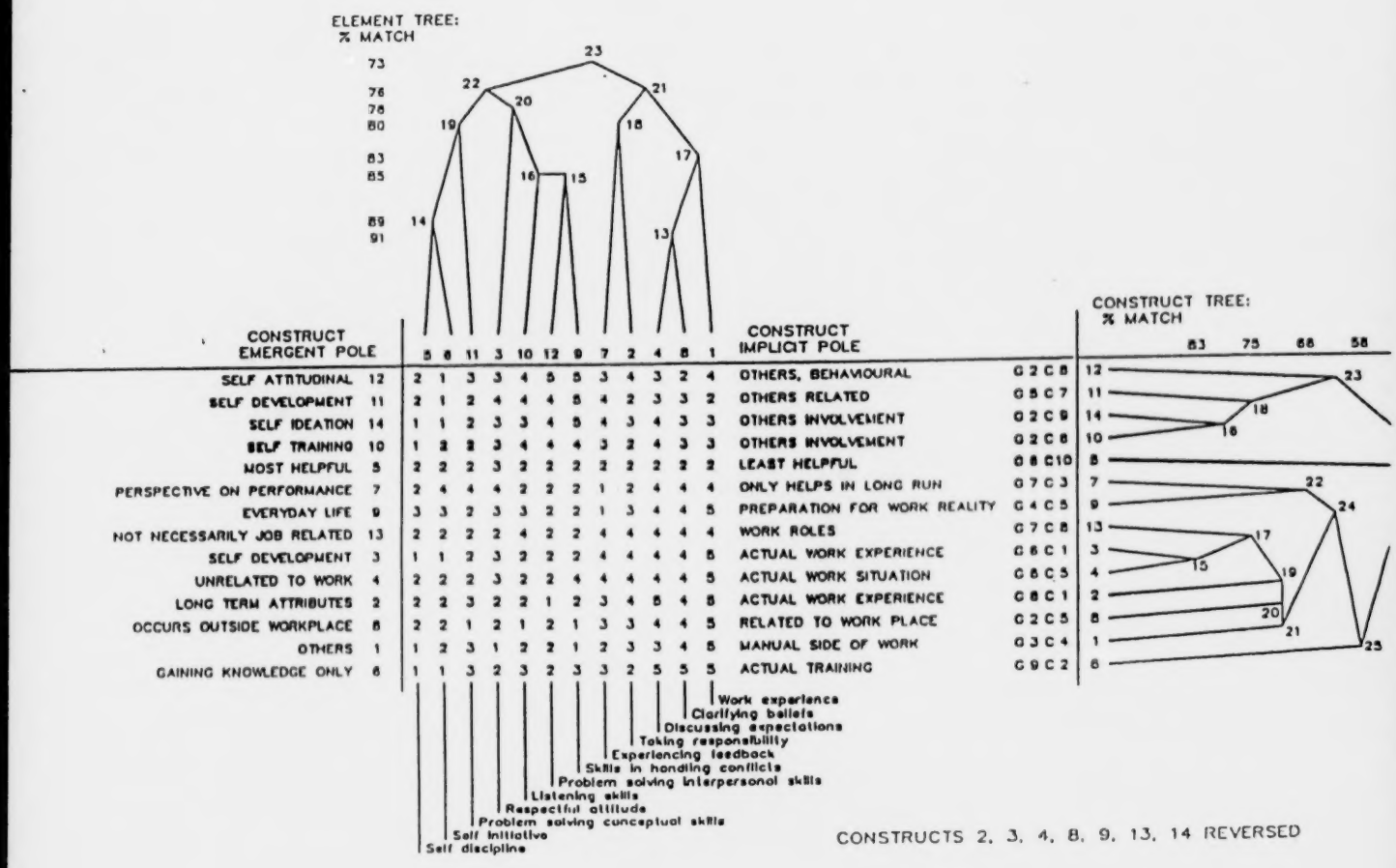
Comparing the construings of the four mode grids, it was detected that the two major themes of self/other and theory/practical were evident throughout the four groups. However, they differed in their construings of which activities were considered to be the most helpful.

School leavers believed work experience was essential preparation for work and relied heavily on their own initiative and self discipline to be able to meet the changes required in the workforce. New recruits quickly learned that work experience at school did not teach them how to utilize interpersonal problem solving skills in conflict situations such as receiving negative feedback. Their main emphasis was on the new recruit having to have listening skills, skills in handling conflict and interpersonal problem solving skills tempered with a good deal of self discipline.

The experienced recruits appeared already to have made some interpersonal adjustments and were more interested in applying problem solving conceptual skills. They were more aware of the difference self initiative and self discipline could make in career progression.

The supervisors considered all activities to be helpful in the transition from school to work. Though no activity was specified as being most helpful, activity 3 (developing a respectful attitude to authority) was considered slightly less helpful than the other eleven. Their emphasis was on the new recruit having to have self discipline before joining the workplace and being able to learn the skills of the job.

Figure 5: Employers' Mode Grid


ELEMENT TREE:
% MATCH
73
76
78
80
83
85
89
91
23
22
21
20
19
18
17
16
15
14
13
CONSTRUCT TREE:
% MATCH
83
75
66
58
CONSTRUCT EMERGENT POLE
5 6 11 3 10 12 9 7 2 4 8 1
CONSTRUCT IMPLICT POLE
SELF ATTITUDINAL 12 2 1 3 3 4 5 5 3 4 3 2 4 OTHERS, BEHAVIOURAL G 2 C 8 12
SELF DEVELOPMENT 11 2 1 2 4 4 4 5 4 2 3 3 2 OTHERS RELATED G 5 C 7 11
SELF IDEATION 14 1 1 2 3 3 4 5 4 3 4 3 3 OTHERS INVOLVEMENT G 2 C 9 14
SELF TRAINING 10 1 2 2 3 4 4 4 3 2 4 3 3 OTHERS INVOLVEMENT G 2 C 6 10
MOST HELPFUL 5 2 2 2 3 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 LEAST HELPFUL G 8 C10 8
PERSPECTIVE ON PERFORMANCE 7 2 4 4 4 2 2 2 1 2 4 4 4 ONLY HELPS IN LONG RUN G 7 C 3 7
EVERYDAY LIFE 9 3 3 2 3 3 2 2 1 3 4 4 5 PREPARATION FOR WORK REALITY G 4 C 5 9
NOT NECESSARILY JOB RELATED 13 2 2 2 2 4 2 2 4 4 4 4 4 WORK ROLES G 7 C 8 13
SELF DEVELOPMENT 3 1 1 2 3 2 2 2 4 4 4 4 5 ACTUAL WORK EXPERIENCE G 6 C 1 3
UNRELATED TO WORK 4 2 2 2 3 2 2 4 4 4 4 4 5 ACTUAL WORK SITUATION G 8 C 5 4
LONG TERM ATTRIBUTES 2 2 2 3 2 2 1 2 3 4 5 4 5 ACTUAL WORK EXPERIENCE G 8 C 1 2
OCCURS OUTSIDE WORKPLACE 8 2 2 1 2 1 2 1 3 3 4 4 5 RELATED TO WORK PLACE G 2 C 5 8
OTHERS 1 1 2 3 1 2 2 1 2 3 3 4 5 MANUAL SIDE OF WORK G 3 C 4 1
GAINING KNOWLEDGE ONLY 6 1 1 3 2 3 2 3 3 2 5 5 5 ACTUAL TRAINING G 9 C 2 6
Work experience
Clarifying beliefs
Discussing expectations
Taking responsibility
Experiencing feedback
Skills in handling conflicts
Problem solving interpersonal skills
Listening skills
Respectful attitude
Problem solving conceptual skills
Self initiative
Self discipline
CONSTRUCTS 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 13, 14 REVERSED

Case Studies Results

The sociogrid analyses identified both a star (the individual most like the mode) and an isolate (the individual least like the mode) for each of the four groups. The stars highlighted the global feelings of the respective groups, while those of the isolates shed light on the feelings of those who construed differently from the mode. Only brief extracts from two of the supervisors' case studies and key points gleaned from the supervisors about the star and isolate new recruits and experienced recruits are reported here. In the case study reports, the colloquial language of the participants was not edited, as some of the expressions contained meanings which were captured more aptly by the style of language used.

Case Study - Star Supervisor

The star supervisor (G) was a 40 year old female administrator who had supervised clerical workers in a private enterprise organisation for eight years.

G rated the elements 7, 1 and 4 as most helpful because she judged that they were essential preparation for work. "Not knowing how to react to performance feedback at work is a major problem for new recruits. Work experience should prepare school leavers so they are not so uncomfortable about performance feedback. Surely discussing expectations about what happens at work before would have to be helpful, because it should bring out issues that could be solved beforehand, so there is not so much trouble at work caused by brand new recruits".

"If a new recruit knows how to listen properly, and knows how to react within a potential conflict situation with authority, then there are few problems. Employers do not want to have to teach new recruits problem solving skills, as it is taken for granted that they have done plenty of that at school. In one sense the activities (12, 2, 8, 6 and 5) represent areas of training that can come later, that is, developing

interpersonal problem solving, but they also represent skills that are part of the individual's personality, such as self discipline and self initiative".

The star supervisor considered activities 10, 12, 9 and 7 important because they helped everyone feel more comfortable on the job, but she conceded that "they were probably too young to learn these at school.

The star supervisor had a very emphatic view about the new recruits having to be trained prior to their entry into the workforce. She felt that it was the education system's fault, as well as the new recruit's own fault, if they were not trained, as employers did not have time to spend on basic training that should have been part of the new recruit's repertoire of skills before they commenced work. She said that it was only those students who had undertaken special courses in grade 11, or who were terminating their education early who were given the benefit of work preparation classes. The star supervisor pointed out that "the schools regarded such people who were put into work preparation programs as being not as clever as those who were going on to grade 12 and hence it was ironical that those students, who completed grade 12 and then became mostly clerical workers, had received no training about the workplace whatsoever".

It is interesting that the star supervisor interpreted all problems as originating with the new recruit, and none as being caused by the supervisor. In this way she differed markedly from the isolate supervisor who explained the need for the supervisor to change their appraisal and give input to the new recruit. The isolate supervisor accepted the untrained recruit and coached them while wishing it was not necessary to do so. The star supervisor did not accept the untrained new recruit nor did she imply that training was necessary and certainly blamed the education department, the new recruits themselves and the unions for high pay rates etcetera.

Case Study - Isolate Supervisor

The isolate supervisor (H) was a 42 year old female administrator who had supervised young clerical workers in a not-for-profit organization for ten years. The isolate supervisor felt that self discipline (5) was very important because she required her subordinates to work efficiently and made sure they knew that she "hated sloppy work". She added that: "I don't even mind if they give me bad work, if they are trying their hardest and are willing. In other words, if they have the `right attitude'."

H felt that activities 9, 10, 11 and 12 (developing skills in handling conflict, listening skills, problem solving conceptual skills and problem solving interpersonal skills) which she had rated as "4" or "5" (least helpful) were very necessary but that they came later on - as part of interpersonal training skills on the job. While they were very helpful and necessary, it was perhaps too much to expect school leavers to have those skills.

H said: "self initiative involved getting up, moving and being motivated; whereas you can solve all the problems of the world in your head without doing anything practical about it".

The follow up telephone interview revealed that the isolate supervisor was still in charge of supervising office workers. Her superior advised that this isolate supervisor was still considered to be performing an excellent job, continued to set goals with the staff, to review their performance and encourage them substantially. The isolate supervisor was still concerned that schools were producing students who were not being trained in basic office skills and reiterated that it seemed to be becoming increasingly difficult to find well trained recruits who had just left school. This supervisor believed that with a combination of good supervision, training activities and basic skills that a new recruit would become an effective worker.

It could be said that the type of supervisor required in the current environment of the transition from school to work was more that type of supervisor depicted by the isolate, rather than the star. With interventions of this nature by the isolate type supervisor at the critical points of the transition process, it would appear that even a poor new recruit has a chance to go on and become an effective worker.

On the other hand, if would appear that if the star supervisor's comments are taken to be representative of the modal (most like the rest of the group) view, then employers did tolerate rather than appreciate the meaning systems of new recruits. Her views were further endorsed by the supervisors of the recruits in the case studies.

SUPERVISORS' VIEWS OF THE RECRUITS' EFFECTIVENESS

Effectiveness of Star New Recruit

This young woman (O) approached the job tasks and relationships with an unusual degree of objectivity. The follow up telephone interview with the supervisor of the star new recruit revealed that the supervisor considered that O had now developed into a socialised, effective worker, but she maintained that O had not been so on arrival and that she had lacked confidence. "Originally while her attitude had been good, she was not one of the better recruits and her skills had been not up to scratch; but she had tried very hard, had done a lot of goal setting and she had been given a lot of feedback."

When asked how she would describe people who had left and who had been ineffective, the supervisor responded that they did not achieve anything, they could not get going with the job, they did not have basic skills, had an attitude problem, were not reliable, would go from job to job and even after many years were still no good.

In clarifying what it was about the transition that had saved the star new recruit, the supervisor said that because O had come without the right skills, she had been in danger of becoming an ineffective worker. However they had provided training activities all throughout the induction stages and initial on the job training and had been able to "train her up". Also fundamentally the girl had had "the right attitude". The supervisor felt that really they tolerated the new recruit from school rather than appreciated them, but in that tolerance they were prepared to accept them and "train them up".

It is important to note that O's supervisor is the isolate supervisor referred to in this study. Such a supervisor, who gives the recruits a chance to improve with coaching, appears to be rare, as evidenced by her "isolate" status.

Effectiveness of Isolate New Recruit

This young man (K) believed that success at work could only be achieved through self development and listening to others and he encapsulated the whole transition process as "successful umpiring". Once again the isolate new recruit was not the norm, but his construing was what was required to become a successful worker. This new recruit sounded as if he knew where he was going and how to get there as well. He appeared to have a very clear grasp of the interpersonal factors in the workplace.

A follow up telephone interview with his supervisor confirmed that the isolate new recruit had become an effective worker as defined by his supervisor because of certain training activities at critical points in the transition. The supervisor indicated that K had come to the organisation with the right attitude towards work and that because he had been given further appropriate training opportunities, he had become an extremely effective worker who had achieved accelerated promotion to a specialised job which was rare within the public service - a "high flier".

The supervisor indicated that K was very different from the "run of the mill" recruits in that he set goals, met his targets, prepared well, organised his work, had great drive and demonstrated self initiative. The supervisors stated that if he had not been given the training activities at the appropriate time, at the critical transition point he would still have been a reasonably effective worker, but his full potential would not have been achieved.

The supervisor believed that unless K had come to the organisation with the right skills and attitudes, then he would not have been able to be trained satisfactorily and may have gone on to become an ineffective worker.

The supervisor's definition of an ineffective worker was someone who really did not try to understand the job, could not think from an organisational perspective, was poor at conceptual processing and conceptual problem solving skills. Such a worker tended to focus only on their own specific area and were not ready to face major changes or new developments.

When asked if he thought such an ineffective worker could have been a product of lack of school to work preparation, the supervisor replied that if they had been given appropriate training they would have developed well. He felt sure that as long as school leavers had their own drive and motivation and were prepared to try to understand (even if they have lacked work experience at school when they came to work and then received further training) they would be able to become effective workers. They had to have those basic skills first and the rest could be developed. So the supervisor determined that if they had the basic skills such as self discipline, self initiative and good conceptual skills, as well as a good attitude, then even if they had missed out on the critical transition training at the school leaver transition point, they could still become effective workers with appropriate training at the initial on-the-job training stage. However he was adamant they could not develop into an effective worker if they did not have those basic skills first.

The supervisors stated that joining the workforce was like a culture shock for school leavers and he suggested that the secondary schools press ahead with the introduction of courses and styles of teaching which develop self reliance and self organisation, as the school leavers needed to develop those areas and certainly needed a lot more help.

Effectiveness of Star Experienced Recruit

The philosophy of this young man (N) was that to be successful, one had to have developed life skills before work related skills and this added up to a happier person who could get along with others. Thus N had conceptualised the socialisation process as firstly behaving in a way which indicated he was trying to break in. Once he was in, there were a number of issues relating to normal conflict in the work place which he had to sort out. Then he was in a position of being able to work out where he fitted in. He construed the successful transition from school to work as "working out your place".

The follow up telephone interview with N's supervisor revealed that N was considered to be a reasonably effective worker, but was more the "middle of the range, not overly motivated or achieving." He was considered to have a poor attitude and lower motivation and drive than the person the supervisor considered to be the most effective recruit. He had moved to another section, but "was not outstanding in his performance nor had he been earmarked for special training". In terms of interpersonal skills, N was considered to be very good as "he was an easy going, steady sort of fellow". N had received some on-the-job training but not a great deal.

The supervisor said that N could not be classified as an ineffective worker, but lacked some of the drive, motivation and self initiative which characterised the successful young person who had come straight from school. He could be classified as "just average". The supervisor contended that the organisational climate of working in the "salt mines" culture may have had an influence on this boy and any others who worked in similar jobs, because such jobs were considered to be uninteresting and boring. The supervisor described an ineffective worker as someone who did not meet their goals, did not perform well, could not organise or plan their work and showed no particular drive or self initiative. He categorised such as worker as "less than average".

Effectiveness of Isolate Experienced Recruit

The isolate experienced recruit (D) believed that "to succeed you had to have the right personality and right ideas." Overall the theme of self discipline echoed throughout the isolate experienced recruit's descriptions, although self confidence was an important issue for her.

This isolate experienced recruit appeared to have a very realistic approach to work and was quite different from the star experienced recruit in that she was more concerned with doing a public service job well, even though this was not how her supervisor perceived her performance.

The follow up telephone interview revealed that this experienced recruit was considered by her supervisor to be "average, and not outstanding in terms of being an effective worker." However the supervisor felt that there were no problems with her interpersonal skills and that she always achieved the goals set for her.

The supervisor's definition of an ineffective worker was someone who did not achieve the goals set for them, who had a poor attitude, fewer qualities, lacked

organisational awareness and may or may not have had good basic skills. An effective worker would have had a positive attitude towards work, good basic skills, organisational awareness and that extra something which he put down to motivation.

SUMMARY

This study obtained feedback from school leavers, recruits and employers about the helpfulness of certain training activities during the transition from school to work. Utilizing repertory grid technology, mode grids for the four groups of school leavers, new recruits, experienced recruits and supervisors were produced and interpreted by participants. With the interpretations and the information from the eight case studies, it was possible to deduce that while the education system needed to introduce specific work preparation activities, much of the success of the school leaver in the workforce depended upon their own basic skills, such as self initiative and self discipline, while systematic, graduated training in the workforce was considered essential.

The critical factor in the successful transition from school leaver to effective worker - a "high flier" - was a combination of basic skills preparation before workforce entry and on-the-job training.

However no amount of on-the-job training could assist the school leaver who lacked the basic skills identified in the study and thus they could not become effective workers - the "less than average" recruit. Nevertheless, if they had not received work preparation before workforce entry, but had the basic skills and were given on-the-job training, then they could still be successful in the workplace as a "just average", "run-of-the-mill" recruit.

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